DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 262 EA 030 585

TITLE	Illinois Charter Schools: Seeds for Change. Annual Report on Illinois Charter Schools, 2000.
INSTITUTION	Illinois State Board of Education, Springfield.
PUB DATE	2000-01-00
NOTE	43p.
PUB TYPE	Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Charter Schools; *Demography; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Ethnic Distribution; Government Publications; Public Schools; *Racial Balance; *Special Classes; *State Boards of Education
IDENTIFIERS	Illinois State Board of Education

ABSTRACT

This document consists of a series of questions generally asked about charter schools. Charter-school personnel provided a major portion of the information. The questions are as follows: "What are charter schools?" "What do Illinois charter schools look like?" "What flexibility do charter schools have?" "How are charter school students achieving?" "How do parents view these schools of choice?" "Have charter schools been successful in Illinois?" "What lessons have been learned about starting a charter school?" "What instructional practices can charter schools share after two years?" "What's been the greatest challenge for charter schools this year?" "Have any charter schools closed?" "Were there any special charter school activities in 1998-99?" "What statutory changes are suggested for charter schools?" "What does the future look like for charter schools in Illinois?" "Does Illinois evaluate charter schools?" Attachments include a list of the 1998-99 charter schools in Illinois and the "Final Report of the 1999 Joint Legislative Committee on Charter Schools Hearings." (DFR)

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ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Annual Report on Illinois Charter Schools

Illinois Charter Schools: *Seeds for Change*

January 2000

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Illinois Charter School Annual Report Requirements

This report is submitted in compliance with Section 27A-12 of the Illinois *Charter Schools Law* (105 ILCS 5/27A-12) for the 1998-99 school year. This section reads:

> *The State Board shall compile annual evaluations of charter schools received from local school boards. The State Board shall review information regarding the regulations and policies from which charter schools were released to determine if the exemption assisted or impeded the charter schools in meeting their stated goals and objectives. Each annual report shall include suggested changes in State law necessary to strengthen or change charter schools.*
>
> *On or before the second Wednesday of January 1998 and on or before the second Wednesday of January of each subsequent calendar year, the State Board shall issue a report to the General Assembly and the Governor on its findings for the school year ending in the preceding calendar year.*
>
> *In preparing the report required by this Section, the State Board shall compare the performance of charter school pupils with the performance of ethnically and economically comparable groups of pupils in other public schools who are enrolled in academically comparable courses.*

The law requires that "*...the State Board of Education shall issue a report to the General Assembly and the Governor on its findings for the school year ending in the preceding calendar year.*" This report is structured to address questions generally asked about charter schools. Charter school personnel provided a major portion of the information.

What Are Charter Schools?

Charter schools in Illinois are public schools of choice, selected by students and parents for their unique offerings. The goal of charter schools is to stimulate creativity, both in new schools and within the existing public schools. Thirty-six states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have passed various forms of charter school legislation. There are now more than 1,680 charter schools operating across the nation, enrolling approximately 350,000 students. As of September, Illinois has 17 charter schools up and running, serving about 6,550 pupils.

The orientation of charter schools varies widely. Some are designed to serve specific student populations such as the primary grades or dual language pupils. Others provide a specific curriculum such as Montessori, back-to-basics, or direct instruction. Yet others are designed with governance and parent involvement components that are integral to their mission.

One aspect of charter schools often cited as the most significant advantage is the right to operate without certain regulations. Charter schools offer parents, teachers and other parties the opportunity to form innovative public schools exempt from all state laws and rules except those deemed essential. The main parameter is that accountability for "input" is exchanged for accountability for "results." However, no state can offer charter schools an exemption from any civil rights laws or any federal special education requirements.

What Do Illinois Charter Schools Look Like?

The Illinois statute governing charter schools was enacted in April 1996 as Article 27A of the School Code to encourage educational excellence and promote new options. In authorizing charter schools, 105 ILCS 5/27A-2 states that it is the intent of the General Assembly:

> *To create a legitimate avenue for parents, teachers and community members to take responsible risks and create new, innovative and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system. The General Assembly seeks to create opportunities within the public school system of Illinois for development of innovative and accountable teaching techniques. The provisions of this Article should be interpreted liberally to support the findings and goals of this Section and to advance a renewed commitment by the State of Illinois to the mission, goals and diversity of public education.*

To help them meet these goals, charter schools are exempt from Illinois mandates except those specified in the *Illinois Charter Schools Law* (e.g., health/life safety, criminal background checks for employees, student discipline, child abuse reporting act, student records act, and state goals/standards/assessment). They are accountable for meeting rigorous school content standards as defined in the Illinois Learning Standards, and students must participate in the state assessments.

Table 1 chronicles the history of Illinois charter schools.

Table 1. Illinois Charter Schools To Date

Charter School in Operation (law passed in April 1996)	***1996-97***	***1997-98***	***1998-99***
ACORN		✓	✓
ACT		✓	✓
Betty Shabazz			✓
Chicago International		✓	✓
Chicago Preparatory		✓	✓*
Fort Bowman Academy			✓
Octavio Paz			✓
North Kenwood/Oakland			✓
North Lawndale			✓
Peoria Alternative	✓	✓	✓
Perspectives		✓	✓
Springfield Ball			✓
Triumphant		✓	✓
Youth Connection		✓	✓

*ceased operations mid-year.

A brief description of each charter school that operated throughout in 1998-99 follows:

- *Academy of Communications and Technology (ACT) Charter School.* This school prepares students for careers in communications and computer technology. In 1998-99 it served grades 6-10, and will eventually serve grades 6-12. It is located on the far west side of Chicago.

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- *ACORN Charter School.* This is a high school program (beginning with grade 9 in 1997-98) that strives to make college entrance a viable alternative for all its students. It is a dual language high school located in the Little Village area of Chicago.

- *Chicago International Charter School.* This school makes a college preparatory education available and focuses on language arts and math. The north campus served students in grades K-9; the south campus served grades K-10; both will eventually have grades K-12. The Chicago Charter School Foundation, the parent organization holding the charter, subcontracts with different organizations for the various site operations.

- *Fort Bowman Academy Charter School.* Located in Cahokia District #187, this school is sponsored by the Education for the Future group and opened in fall 1998. It served grades K-6 in 1998-99.

- *North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School.* The charter school provides challenging learning in all areas, with a special emphasis on literacy and the arts. Affiliated with the University of Chicago's Center for School Improvement network of public schools, the school serves as a learning site for public school teachers and administrators interested in school improvement.

- *North Lawndale College Preparatory Charter High School.* Affiliated with the *I Have A Dream Foundation*, the charter school belief is that all of their students can be ambitious and motivated. The college preparatory high school integrates high academic expectations with community service, work experience, and technology education to encourage and enable students in the North Lawndale community to attend and graduate from college.

- *Octavio Paz Charter School.* Affiliated with the United Neighborhood Organization and managed by Advantage Schools, the school targets students in the Latino communities of Pilsen and Little Village to provide a socioeconomically diverse population with educational, skill development and career opportunities.

- *Perspectives Charter School.* This is a multicultural, interdisciplinary high school, now serving grades 6-11. It is in the near south side in Chicago. There is a very strong emphasis on discipline within this school.

- *Betty Shabazz International Charter School.* Affiliated with the Institute for Positive Education, the charter school is dedicated to the total development of children who are traditionally underserved by public education. The elementary school combines an African-centered theme with communications technology, linking students to local community resources and to schools in South Africa, Brazil and Ghana. It is in the Grand Crossing/Burnham area of Chicago.

- *Springfield Ball Charter School.* Located in Springfield District #186, this school is sponsored by the Ball Foundation of Glen Ellyn and opened in fall 1998. It has a theme of literacy and numeracy, operates an extended school year and offers Spanish language instruction for all grades as an integral part of the curriculum.

- *Triumphant Charter Middle School.* This Chicago program serves students who are at risk of academic failure and older than traditional students grades 6-8. It is designed to serve

150 students ages 12-15 with a student-centered, interdisciplinary curriculum and a supportive, nurturing environment. Triumphant prides itself on teaching the "hard to reach" students.

- *Youth Connection Charter School.* This is an alternative program operating at 26 sites throughout Chicago. It serves high school age youth. Youth Connection Charter School students often enroll after months and sometimes years of being out of school. On average, they are 17 years old with nine high school credits.

The following tables display additional information regarding the 14 (later, 13) charter schools in Illinois in operation throughout 1998-99, as reported to the State Board of Education in fall 1999. Charter schools data is self-reported and should be viewed within the context of the school's geographic area and school district, rather than on an isolated or statewide basis. Information in brackets relates to the authorizing district as a whole.

Table 2A. Charter School Demographic Data for 1998-99

Name of 1998-99 Charter Schools	***Grades Served in 1998-99***	***School Sites***	***Enrollment***	***Lottery for 1998-99 new students***	***School Days***	***School Hours***
ACORN	9-10	1 site	117	43 applications for 38 new students	178 days	8:30—3:30
ACT	6-10	1 site	155	120 applications for 50 new students	181 days	8:00—3:30
Chicago International	K-10	2 sites	1552	900 applications for 290 new students	180 days;	8:00—3:30
Fort Bowman Academy	K-6	1 site	136	136 applications for Year 1	178 days;	8:00—4:00
North Kenwood/ Oakland	K-5	1 site	113		180 days	8:30-3:00
North Lawndale	9	1 site	86	135 applications for Year 1	183 days	8:00-3:30
Octavio Paz	K-6	2 sites	527	753 applications for Year 1	183 days	8:00-3:30-
Peoria Alternative	7-12	1 site	100		176 days	
Perspectives	6-12	1 site	130	125 applied for 41 new students	177 days	8:30—3:00
Betty Shabazz	K-8	1 site	266	433 applications for Year 1	192 days	8:30—2:45
Springfield Ball	K-3	1 site	175	350 applications for Year 1	200 days	9:00-3:30
Triumphant	6-8	1 site	170	50 new applications	185 days	7:50—4:00
Youth Connection	9-12	26 sites	1475	1696 new applications	183 days	8:00 AM—9:00 PM

Part of the flexibility of charter schools is the freedom to select their own schedule, apart from the district they serve. They can also select the grades or ages they wish to serve. Once that determination is made, enrollment is open across the district to all students of that age or grade. If there is an enrollment larger than the potential number of students allowed, a lottery must be held. In many instances the charter schools had more applicants than seats available.

Table 2B. Student Demographic Data for 1998-99

Name of 1998-99 Charter Schools	*Low income % of school [and for school district]*	*# and % of drop outs*	*# and /% suspended*	*# and % expelled*	*# graduated*
ACORN	93.50% [83.19%]	7 6%	8 8%	0	0
ACT	88.67% [83.19%]	7 4.5%	53 34%	2 1.25%	0
Chicago International	88.18% [83.19%]	0	55 3.5%	0	114 from 8th grade
Fort Bowman Academy	* [70.73%]	0	7 5%	1 75%	0
North Lawndale	75.29% [83.19%]		9 10.5%	0	0
North Kenwood/ Oakland	64.86% [83.19%]	0	5 4.5%	0	0
Octavio Paz	85.44% [83.19%]	0	120 22.8%	0	0
Peoria Alternative	33.33% [58.87%]	6 6%	0 0%	1%	1 from 9th grade
Perspectives	84.92% [83.19%]	1 .75%	9 7%	0	24 from 8th grade
Betty Shabazz	57.09% [83.19%]	0	12 4.5%	0	0
Springfield Ball	20.00% [52.02%]	0	0	0	0
Triumphant	87.50% [83.19%]	0	4 2.4%	0	68 from 8th grade
Youth Connection	75.20% [83.19%]	148 10%	0	0	229

*Fort Bowman does not ask income information of attending families.

Table 2C. Charter School Racial Ethnic Enrollment Data for 1998-99

Name of 1998-99 Charter Schools	*Race and ethnic background served in the charter school [and school district]*
ACORN	.81% White; 4.06% Black; 95.12% Hispanic [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
ACT	94.67% Black; 5.33% Hispanic [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
Chicago International	6.98% White; 73.53% Black; .06% Indian; .30% Asian; 19.13% Hispanic [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
Fort Bowman Academy	71.77% White; 28.23% Black [31.34% White; 67.39% Black; .30% Asian; .98% Hispanic]
North Lawndale	100% Black [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
North Kenwood/Oakland	.90% White; 98.20% Black; .9% Asian [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
Octavio Paz	1.70% White; 40.83% Black; 57.47% Hispanic [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
Peoria Alternative	20% White; 77.78% Black; 2.22% Hispanic [42.12% White; 53.91% Black; .07% Indian; 1.68% Asian; 2.22% Hispanic]
Perspectives	.79% White; 68.20% Black; .79% Indian; 30.16% Hispanic [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
Betty Shabazz	100% Black [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
Springfield Ball	69.71% White; 26.29% Black; .57% Indian; 2.86% Asian; .57% Hispanic [65.32% White; 31.86% Black; .17% Indian; 1.69% Asian; .96% Hispanic]
Triumphant	92.26% Black; 7.73% Hispanic [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18 Indian; 3.15 Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]
Youth Connection	5.65% White; 62.50% Black.; 1.51% Asian; 30.34% Hispanic [10.10% White; 53.15% Black; .18% Indian; 3.15% Asian; 33.42% Hispanic]

Again, with charter school students attending by parent choice, the student body is composed of parent selection plus a lottery process when the school is oversubscribed. This selection process means that the district population is not necessarily mirrored in the school's demographics. Those charter schools whose districts that are still under a desegregation order must keep that in mind in the lottery process.

Table 2D. Students With Special Needs in 1998-99

Name of 1998-99 Charter Schools	*# of students with IEPs served by charter school*	*%of charter school students with IEPs*	*% served by school district*	*# of students with LEP served by charter school*	*% of charter school students with LEP*	*% served by school district*
ACORN	11	9.5%	9.7%	40	23%	16.4%
ACT	15	10%	9.7%	0	0%	16.4%
Chicago International	87	5.5%	9.7%	0	0%	16.4%
Fort Bowman Academy	0	0%	14.7%	0	0%	.68%

North Lawndale	7	8.5%	9.7%	0	0%	16.4%
North Kenwood/Oakland	5	4.5%	9.7%	0	0%	16.4%
Octavio Paz	44	8.4%	9.7%	15	2.9%	16.4%
Peoria Alternative	3	3%	15.9%	0	0%	.79%
Perspectives	15	11.5%	9.7%	0	0%	16.4%
Betty Shabazz	10	3.75%	9.7%	0	0%	16.4%
Springfield Ball	10	6%	15.2%	1	.65%	.33%
Triumphant	27	16%	9.7%	0	0%	16.4%
Youth Connection	0	0%	9.7%	0	0%	16.4%

Charter schools must enroll students in the district of the appropriate age and grade level upon parent choice of that school. If there is an oversubscription of students, then a lottery is held. Students with disabilities or limited-English proficiency, for example, must be accepted as well. Charter schools must observe all of the civil rights protections for students in their enrollment processes. Services provided on an Individual Education Plan for children and youth with disabilities must be provided. Generally, there is a contract between the charter school and the home school district to provide such services and paid for by the charter school receiving less than the fully requested amount (e.g., 95% rather than 100% per capita tuition).

Table 3. 1998-99 Staff Data (in full-time equivalents)

Name of 1998-99 Charter School	***Instructional Personnel***		***Administrative Personnel***	
	Overall	***Certified***	***Overall***	***Certified***
ACORN	10	0	4	0
ACT	11	7	2	0
Chicago International	98	67	33	4
Fort Bowman Academy	7	7	1	0
North Lawndale	5	2	2	0
North Kenwood/Oakland	5.5	5.5	.5	.5
Octavio Paz	36	24	5	1
Peoria Alternative	8	4	1.2	2
Perspectives	9	7	4	0
Betty Shabazz	17	9	1	1
Springfield Ball	9	9	1	1
Triumphant	9	8	1	1
Youth Connection	152	121	46	6

The *Illinois Charter Schools Law* addresses two options for personnel credentials, while traditional public schools have only one of these routes to follow. Staff can either hold Illinois teacher certification as required in order to teach in traditional public schools *or* have a bachelor's degree **and** at least five years relevant experience **and** pass the state tests of basic skills and relevant subject matter. As noted in Table 3, many of the charter schools exercise this

option. It is generally for the harder-to-find staff that this choice is made, e.g., bilingual personnel.

What Flexibility Do Charter Schools Have?

The *Illinois Charter Schools Law* exempts charter schools from Illinois school requirements except those deemed essential. The rationale for the exemption is consistent with the purpose of the law--to ensure the charter schools have maximum flexibility for serving students while being held accountable for results. Major decisions such as curriculum, service delivery, and program options are left to the discretion of the charter school governing board, rather than subject to state school mandates.

As in 1997-98, the charter schools operating throughout 1998-99 specified that having personnel flexibility served their schools and students well. What the charter school administrators reflected was the current law allows them to:

- Hire qualified teachers regardless of certification status.
- For Chicago charter schools, employ individuals who had demonstrated experience in teaching children but who did not meet Chicago Public School requirements (e.g., nonpublic school experience or out-of-state school experience).
- Allow a combination of certificated and noncertificated staff, especially important for small schools with limited budgets, which find it difficult to compete with wages demanded by certificated teachers.
- In one case, make staff changes quickly, replacing two teachers mid-year for nonperformance.

Other areas of flexibility appreciated by the charter school developers or administrators, even though not all are "mandates", were:

- Freedom from local teacher union regulations.
- Autonomy to design their own curriculum; creating their own discipline policies, and providing innovative professional development opportunities.
- Ability to contract with educational vendors.
- Exemption from the state graduation requirements and instructional minute requirements, which allowed them to develop an innovative graduation process and emphasize certain curriculum areas.
- Ability to have longer school days and thus more time on task.

It is critical that flexibility continues to be possible for charter schools. They should not be gradually made over by incremental small changes in the law into smaller versions of traditional public schools. If that becomes the case, the reason for having this parental choice will be moot.

How Are Charter School Students Achieving?

One of the basic premises of charter schools is that accountability for "input" is exchanged for accountability for "results." Accountability has been, is and will continue to be a key question regarding charter schools at the local and state levels.

The requirements for the annual report cite "*...In preparing the report...the State Board shall compare the performance of charter school pupils with the performance of ethnically and*

economically comparable groups of pupils in other public schools who are enrolled in academically comparable courses...." The 1998-99 charter schools supplied information to the State Board of Education regarding neighborhood or comparable populations.

A prerequisite for student enrollment in charter schools is that the charter school must open its admission to all students in the school district. Thus students who attend charter schools can and do come from the immediate neighborhood as well as far distant areas of the school district.

Some area comparisons were noted by the charter schools

- *North Kenwood/Oakland* compared itself to a neighborhood elementary school, Dyett. The scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in reading were 22% for Dyett and 64% for North Kenwood/Oakland; in math, 24% for Dyett and 48% for North Kenwood/Oakland.
- The scores at *Betty Shabazz* from the ITBS put their students in the "middle" of the rest of the charter schools that have been established a year longer than they have been. Their composite scores were higher than the schools in their immediate area such as Burnside Elementary School.
- At *North Lawndale*, the performance on Test of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) in math and English was 8-10% higher than local traditional public schools. On average over the past five years, fewer than 12% of the students at other neighborhood high schools have performed at or above national norms in both reading and math, though it is worth noting that one of the local high schools showed dramatic improvement in both areas this year. On a pre-test in September 1998 with incoming students, 12.5% were at or above national norms in reading and 22.5% were at or above same in math. At the end of 1998-99, 16.7% performed at or above national norms in reading and 25.6% were at or above in math.
- *ACT* middle school students performed very similar to the nearby schools—21.8% at grade level in reading and 23.6% at grade level in math. Their high school students scored low but not significantly lower than the nearby traditional public high schools—7.2% at grade level in reading and 17.4% at grade level in math.

Some of the charter schools noted comparisons broader than their immediate areas

- Given their student population, *Youth Connection* compares favorably to other District #299 high schools classified as "special population high schools" within Chicago. Youth Connection ranked #2 in reading and #3 in math in terms of the number of students reading and computing at the national norm on the TAP for special population high schools. Youth Connection also compared favorably to traditional public high schools in the district, scoring higher than 41 traditional public high schools as measured by the TAP reading exam.
- Students at *North Lawndale* achieved 1.2 years average growth in reading and math during 1998-99, as measured on the TAP. Students also achieved 2.2 years of growth in science.
- While *Youth Connection's* state test performance was below the state average, it came within 2-4% points of the district in all performance areas except math.

Students in the charter schools in 1997 and 1998 took the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) tests. Those in school in 1999 took the IGAP tests in science and social science. The following tables show the percentages of students who performed at three performance areas tested by the IGAP. Illinois educators helped establish the performance levels. This is the last year for the IGAP test. Next year, ISAT will test students' achievement of the Illinois Learning Standards in science and social science. Tables 4A and B use the three-level system for IGAP.

- Level 1 - Does Not Meet State Goals. Lacks expected knowledge and skills and has limited ability to apply learning.

- Level 2 - Meets State Goals. Demonstrates expected knowledge and skills and can usually apply learning to real-life problems
- Level 3 - Exceeds State Goals. Performs at a high level and consistently applies knowledge and skills to real-life problems

Table 4C uses the four-level system for ISAT. The tables show the percentages of the charter schools' students in each of four performance levels. These levels were established with the help of Illinois educators who teach the grade levels and learning areas tested.

- Level 1 - Academic Warning. Students' work shows an inconsistent command of the basic knowledge and skills. Students have major gaps in their knowledge and skills and little ability to apply them. They may have errors or misunderstandings.
- Level 2 - Below Standards – Students' work shows basic knowledge and skills in the learning area. However, students have some gaps in their learning and can apply it only in limited ways.
- Level 3 - Meets Standards. Students' work shows that they have knowledge and skills in the learning area. Students consistently use and apply their knowledge and skills to solve problems.
- Level 4 - Exceeds Standards. Students' work is outstanding and shows comprehensive knowledge and skills in the learning area. Students consistently use their knowledge and skills to solve problems and evaluate the results.

Poverty is a strong indicator of academic achievement. The factors of prior experience and educational opportunity must also be kept in mind. While there has not been an effort to correlate the low-income level of the school (see Table 2B) with student achievement (see Tables 4A-C), this is a factor to consider in the long-term accountability picture (three-to-five years). Given the fact that these charter schools are still so new, this report does not correlate academic achievement with poverty.

Table 4A. 1997-1999 Science and Social Science IGAP Comparisons (Levels 1, 2 and 3)—Grades 4, 7, and 11

	Science				Social Science			
Name of Charter Schools and # of Students Tested	***Grade***	***Level 1***	***Level 2***	***Level 3***	***Grade***	***Level 1***	***Level 2***	***Level 3***
STATEWIDE	**1999**	**1999**	**1999**	**1999**	**1999**	**1999**	**1999**	**1999**
4—all students	**4**	**12**	**56**	**32**	**4**	**22**	**49**	**29**
7—all students	**7**	**19**	**49**	**32**	**7**	**19**	**49**	**32**
11—all students	**11**	**22**	**56**	**22**	**11**	**13**	**66**	**21**
ACT	1999				1999			
7th: 37	7	45.9	45.9	8.1	7	40.5	56.8	2.7

Chicago International North 4th: 51-56 7th: 49-56	1998 4 1999 4 7	24 11.5 23.2	55 75 64.3	22 13.5 12.5	1998 4 1999 4 7	38 28.8 25	38 61.5 55.4	25 9.6 19.6
South 4th: 88-91 7th: 51—91	1998 4 1999 4 7	24 26.4 32.1	72 69.2 64.2	5 4.4 3.8	1998 4 1999 4 7	38 56.7 35.3	44 37.8 54.9	7 5.6 9.8
Octavio Paz 4th: 70-71	1999 4	56.3	43.7	0	1999 4	75.7	24.3	0
Perspectives 7th: 19 11th: 23	1999 7 11	36.8 47.8	57.9 52.2	5.3% 0	1999 7 11	31.6 4.3	57.9 95.7	10.5 0
Betty Shabazz 4th: 44	1999 4	31.8	63.6	4.5	1999 4	61.4	38.6	0
Triumphant 7th: 51-63	1999 7	70.6	29.4	0	1999 7	60.3	39.7	0
Youth Connection 11th: 202-207	1999 11	51.5	44.6	4	1999 11	23.7	72	4.3
Chicago #299	**1998** **4** **7** **11** **1999** **4** **7** **11**	 **21** **23** **41** **27** **37** **46**	 **66** **63** **53** **64** **52** **49**	 **13** **14** **6** **10** **12** **6**	**1998** **4** **7** **11** **1999** **4** **7** **11**	 **36** **29** **26** **47** **35** **28**	 **50** **54** **67** **45** **52** **65**	 **14** **17** **7** **8** **13** **7**
Fort Bowman Academy 4th: 19	1999 4	15.8	78.9	5.3	1999 4	15.8	57.9	26.3
Cahokia #187	**1999** **4**	**22**	**64**	**14**	**1999** **4**	**35**	**49**	**16**
Peoria Alternative 1997 7th: 9 11th: 2 1998 7th: 9 11th: 2 1999 7th: 4 11th: 6	1997 7 11 1998 7 11 1999 7 11	 100 50 44 50 100 83.3	 0 50 56 50 0 16.7	 0 0 0 0 0 0	1997 7 11 1998 7 11 1999 7 11	 100 50 56 100 100 83.3	 0 50 44 0 0 16.7	 0 0 0 0 0 0
Peoria #150	**1997** **7** **11** **1998** **7** **11**	 **26** **29** **8** **29**	 **53** **54** **56** **52**	 **21** **17** **26** **19**	**1997** **7** **11** **1998** **7** **11**	 **26** **17** **22** **15**	 **50** **63** **46** **65**	 **23** **20** **31** **19**

Table 4B. 1997 and 1998 Reading, Math and Writing IGAP Comparisons
Levels 1, 2 and 3 — Grades 3, 6, 8 and 10

	Reading				Math				Writing			
Name of Charter Schools and # Pupils Tested	*Grade*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*	*Grade .*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*	*Grade .*	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*
STATE	**1997**				**1997**				**1997**			
	3	**29**	**52**	**20**	**3**	**10**	**63**	**27**	**3**	**14**	**61**	**25**
	6	**37**	**46**	**17**	**6**	**13**	**61**	**26**	**6**	**6**	**52**	**41**
	8	**34**	**50**	**16**	**8**	**12**	**62**	**26**	**8**	**13**	**56**	**31**
	10	**38**	**46**	**16**	**10**	**22**	**50**	**27**	**10**	**12**	**36**	**23**
	1998				**1998**				**1998**			
	3	**28**	**51**	**21**	**3**	**8**	**65**	**27**	**3**	**13**	**62**	**25**
	6	**30**	**49**	**21**	**6**	**11**	**64**	**25**	**6**	**6**	**56**	**38**
	8	**30**	**53**	**17**	**8**	**12**	**63**	**25**	**8**	**12**	**59**	**29**
	10	**32**	**44**	**24**	**10**	**14**	**54**	**26**	**10**	**42**	**37**	**21**
Chicago International North	1998				1998				1998			
3	3	37.3	52.5	10.2	3	6.6	72.1	21.3	3	5.1	67.8	27.1
6	6	40	43.3	16.7	6	23.3	65	11.7	6	5	78.3	16.7
8	8	48.3	44.8	6.9	8	37.9	58.6	3.4	8	21.4	60.7	17.9
South	South				South				South			
3	3	60.8	29.9	9.3	3	27.6	67.3	5.1	3	29.9	51.5	18.8
6	6	53.8	38.5	7.7	6	29.3	67.1	3.7	6	27.7	68.7	3.6
8	8	53.5	39.5	7	8	31.8	61.4	6.8	8	46.8	48.9	4.3
Chicago Preparatory 10th: 10–17	1998 10	100	0	0	1998 10	44	22	33	1998 10	86	14	0
Perspectives	1998				1998				1998			
8th: 22	8	32	64	5	8	38	62	0	8	41	59	0
10th: 30	10	41	48	48	10	47	53	0	10	70	30	0
Triumphant	1998				1998				1998			
8th: 43	8	67	33	0	8	44	56	0	8	50	42	8
Youth Connection 10th: 364	1998 10	72	26	3	1998 10	75	24	1	1998 10	92	8	0
Chicago #299	**1998**	**19985**	**1998**	**1998**	**1998**	**1998**	**1998**	**1998**	**1998**	**1998**	**1998**	**1998**
	3	**4**	**39**	**6**	**3**	**20**	**70**	**10**	**3**	**24**	**62**	**14**
	6	**55**	**38**	**8**	**6**	**26**	**65**	**9**	**6**	**14**	**71**	**15**
	8	**51**	**43**	**7**	**8**	**28**	**64**	**8**	**8**	**24**	**61**	**14**
	10	**52**	**38**	**10**	**10**	**44**	**49**	**7**	**10**	**64**	**28**	**8**
Peoria Alternative 1997 6th: 3 8th: 8 10th: 14	1997 6	100	0	0	1997 6	100	0	0	1997 6	67	33	0
	8	38	63	0	8	63	38	0	8	71	29	0
	10	86	14	0	10	64	29	7	10	69	31	0
1998 6th: 4 8th: 10 10th: 11	1998 6	75	25	0	1998 6	67	33	0	1998 6	50	50	0
	8	90	10	0	8	78	22	0	8	100	0	0
	10	90	10	0	10	91	9	0	10	100	0	0

Peoria #150	1997	1997	1997	1997	1997	1997	1997	1997	1997	1997	1997	1997
10	6	48	41	11	6	23	58	19	6	6	62	32
	8	41	46	13	8	21	60	18	8	17	60	23
	10	44	39	16	10	35	45	20	10	50	33	17
	1998				1998				1998			
	6	40	44	16	6	21	60	19	6	8	68	25
	8	41	44	15	8	9	65	16	8	20	58	22
	10	38	40	22	10	34	48	17	10	51	34	15

Table 4C. 1999 Reading, Math and Writing ISAT Comparison
Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 — Grades 3, 5, 8 and 10

	Reading					Math					Writing				
Name of Charter Schools and # of Students Tested	*Grade*	*L 1*	*L 2*	*L3*	*L4*	*Grade*	*L 1*	*L 2*	*L 3*	*L 4*	*Grade*	*L 1*	*L 2*	*L 3*	*L 4*
STATE	**3**	**8**	**31**	**44**	**17**	**3**	**12**	**20**	**47**	**21**	**3**	**9**	**35**	**50**	**6**
All pupils	**5**	**1**	**38**	**37**	**24**	**5**	**6**	**39**	**53**	**3**	**5**	**2**	**23**	**52**	**23**
	8	**1**	**27**	**54**	**18**	**8**	**5**	**52**	**36**	**7**	**8**	**5**	**36**	**56**	**3**
	10	**5**	**25**	**55**	**15**	**10**	**6**	**41**	**47**	**5**	**10**	**6**	**28**	**54**	**12**
ACORN 10th: 60-63	10	12.7	57.1	30.2	0	10	9.7	83.9	6.5	0	10	10	38.3	48.3	3.3
ACT 10th: 56—60	10	19.6	55.4	25	0	10	19	79.3	1.7	0	10	18.3	60	20	1.7
Chicago International North	North					North					North				
3rd: 50-51st	3	14	44	34	8	3	9.8	43.1	45.1	2	3	20	62	18	0
5th: 46-49	5	2	38.8	32.7	26.5	5	8.2	40.8	49	2	5	0	17.4	54.3	28.3
8TH: 49-50	8	2	26.5	61.2	10.2	8	8	88	4	0	8	8.2	53.1	38.8	0
South	South	—	—	—	—	South	—	—	—	—	South	—	—	—	—
3rd: 102-106	3	19	52.4	24.8	3.8	3	21.6	35.3	41.2	2	3	14.2	56.6	29.2	0
5th: 88—89	5	0	62.5	30.7	6.8	5	9	58.4	32.6	0	5	1.1	27.3	63.6	8
8th: 55-59	8	1.8	33.9	57.1	7.1	8	14.5	74.5	10.9	0	8	6.8	81.4	11.9	0
10th: 33-40	10	13.2	39.5	47.4	0	10	18.2	81.8	0	0	10	12.5	35	50	2.5
North Kenwood/ Oakland 5th: 26	5	0	50	23.1	26.9	5	0	65.4	34.6	0	5	0	15.4	53.8	30.8
Octavio Paz	3	40.2	43.9	15.9	0%	3	52.9	36.5	10.6	0	3	34.2	49.3	15.1	1.4
3rd: 73—85	5	2.8	75%	19.4	2.8	5	23.5	70.6	5.9	0	5	16.4	67.2	16.4	0
5th: 67—72															
Perspectives	8	0	45.5	50	4.5	8	4.5	86.4	9.1	0	8	0	54.5	45.5	0

8th: 22 10th: 19-21	10	14.3	38.1	47.6	0	10	15	70	15	0	10	21.1	47.4	31.6	0
Betty Shabazz 3rd: 29—32 5th: 25—26	3 5	12.5 0	43.8 53.8	21.9 34.6	21.9 11.5	3 5	38.2 26.9	20.6 57.7	35.3 7.7	5.9 7.7	3 5	41.4 0	44.8 80	13.8 20	0 0
Triumphant 8th: 74—76	8	1.3	61.8	36.8	0	8	22.7	77.3	0	0	8	16.2	70.3	13.5	0
Youth Connection 10th: 226-231	10	16.5	42.9	36.8	3.9	10	25.8	65.1	9.2	0	10	37.6	49.1	13.3	0
Chicago #299	**3** **5** **8** **10**	**19** **3** **1** **12**	**48** **60** **42** **41**	**28** **28** **48** **41**	**5** **9** **9** **6**	**3** **5** **8** **10**	**27** **13** **10** **15**	**33** **59** **71** **62**	**35** **28** **17** **23**	**6** **1** **2** **1**	**3** **5** **8** **10**	**20** **5** **10** **14**	**48** **42** **55** **45**	**29** **47** **34** **37**	**2** **6** **1** **4**
Fort Bowman Academy 3rd: 14—16 5th: 15—16	3 5	7.1 0	42.9 62.5	42.9 25	7.1 12.5	3 5	4.3 0	35.7 75	42.9 25	7.1 0	3 5	0 0	75 46.7	25 53.3	0 0
Cahokia #187	**3** **5**	**10** **8**	**45** **59**	**36** **24**	**9** **9**	**3** **5**	**17** **15**	**25** **57**	**43** **28**	**15** **1**	**3** **5**	**12** **9**	**51** **35**	**36** **47**	**2** **9**
Peoria Alternative 8th: 4-6 10th: 6-7	8 10	0 33.3	100 50	0 16.7	0 0	8 10	0 57.1	100 42.9	0 0	0 0	8 10	50 33.3	50 66.7	0 0	0 0
Peoria #150	**8** **10**	**1** **8**	**31** **31**	**50** **49**	**18** **13**	**8** **10**	**8** **14**	**62** **50**	**25** **35**	**5** **2**	**8** **10**	**6** **8**	**40** **31**	**49** **55**	**4** **5**
Springfield Ball 3rd: 24—25	3	4	12	60	24	3	12	16	56	16	3	20.8	45.8	29.2	4.2
Springfield #186	**3**	**8**	**34**	**43**	**15**	**3**	**17**	**24**	**44**	**15**	**3**	**11**	**38**	**47**	**3**

Tables 4A-C reflect a mixed review on assessment. Some charter schools are doing better than similar grades in their home school district; others are not doing as well. No single generic statement about the 13 charter schools that completed 1998-99 is appropriate.

How Do Parents View These Schools of Choice?

Beyond test scores, parent viewpoints are critical in measuring school success at schools of choice. Some information from families is reflected below:

- Parents at *Springfield Ball Charter* identified the greatest strength of the school is in the staff, principal, enthusiasm and commitment; parent involvement; children being the priority; foreign language requirement; communication; individualization; the welcoming and open atmosphere; and the teaching quality and methods.

- Parents at *ACORN* were most satisfied with the climate—safe, controlled and focused on education. They also believed that the student-teacher relationship was important in setting the tone.

- Parents at *Fort Bowman Academy* liked the eight-hour day; the openness of the classrooms in terms of safety; the family atmosphere; and the class size limit of 20.

- Parents at *Octavio Paz* were most satisfied with the academic program and the full-school behavior management system. The school's code of civility and its discipline policy were appreciated for consistency and fairness. Parents also expressed concern about the lack of playground facilities and turnover in school leadership.

- Parents at *Perspectives* were pleased with the safe, clean, family-like atmosphere.

- Parents at *Triumphant* were satisfied with the dedication and ratio of teachers to students. They feel that their children as well as the parents receive a lot of attention and involvement from the faculty and staff. Parents were pleased that each student is being prepared for high school while actually being enrolled at Olive-Harvey City College for Friday classes. Parents were dissatisfied with the bus service in terms of insufficient capacity.

- Parents at *Youth Connection* were satisfied with the small class settings and the accessibility of the staff to meet with parents.

- Parents at *North Lawndale* liked the detailed written six-week progress reports, and that the staff was so respectful, friendly and helpful. They believed there were insufficient extra-curricular activities. There were parent "coffees" each month on topics chosen by the parents, and 35-50 parents generally attended the sessions. Over 85% of the parents participated in at least one academic conference over the course of the year.

- Parents at *ACT* were pleased with the school's size and access to school staff. The major dissatisfaction is with the school's high academic expectations. While they like the challenging academic environment, students are sometimes struggling to reach for those high goals and parents were sometimes frustrated with their inability to help their children stay motivated.

Have Charter Schools Been Successful in Illinois?

The short answer is "yes," they have been successful for the students they serve. Although they have been around for only a brief period of time, they are serving as seeds of change in their local communities. During that time they have been under the "microscope" of educational observers even though no school still open has made it through a complete charter period.

In addition to the student achievement information noted above, there are many ways to measure school success. Beyond the comparison with local or state student achievement data is the perspective of other measures of success and accountability as viewed by parents, educators and the community. This covers many areas of education and the educational process:

- Compared to the traditional public schools in the area, *ACORN* staff believes their school climate is more secure, the students are safer and they can focus on their work. They are developing a culture of achievement that will set a tone for students who attend the school in the future.

- Success was viewed at *Springfield Ball Charter* by the long waiting list, parents' positive regard for the school, documented academic achievement, effective governance system, focused and talented staff, and attention to individual students.

- *Triumphant's* greatest success has been helping students, who had given up on being successful, learn the correct behaviors and attitudes that ensure success in school and needed for lifelong learning. Parents are constantly commenting on how their child's behavior has improved at home.

- At *North Lawndale*, the attendance rate was 16% higher than neighborhood schools. The mobility rate was 30% lower than local high schools.

- The most critical component of *Perspective's* success was its Disciplined Life Principles. As a learning community, they live within a framework of principles that help guide them to become responsible, fair, kind and productive people. They believe that working daily on being supportive and fair to one another is essential for serious long-term academic progress.

- Mobility rate at *ACT* was on average lower than the area schools when comparable grade levels are used--4.8% versus 20-30%.

- At *Betty Shabazz*, the students were the success stories. When visitors come to the school, many remark about the student decorum and attitude. The students have brought their cultural backgrounds, their cultural experiences, and their creativity together to make their learning fun and challenging. The school's vegetarian lunches are a big hit.

- *At Octavio Paz*, all pupils who were monolingual in Spanish at the beginning of the year left at the end of 1998-99 speaking and reading English. Many became fluent writers in English as well. Non-English speaking parents reported that they learned English from their children.

- *Youth Connection* shared a very concrete view of their students' success:
  - 229 former high school dropouts earned their high school diplomas.
  - 48 students gained a GED.
  - 932 students or 95% earned three or more credits during 1998-99.
  - 70% of the students who attended the full year improved their reading by eight months or more, with an average yearly grade gain of one year and four months.
  - 73% of the students who attended the full year improved their math by eight months or more, with an average yearly grade gain of one year and five months.

- At *North Lawndale*, 32 students were involved in summer internships (at Lucent Technologies, where the students are building web sites; and at a top tier law firm in Chicago where students are shadowing professionals).

- Some students receiving special education services at *Triumphant* have made significant increases in their test scores, to the extent that they achieved the promotion standard for general education students at their school.

- At *ACT*, all 9th and 10th grade students have been involved in field experiences. Students work in colleges, hospitals, newspaper offices, law offices, art galleries and social service agencies. As a result, students will have a greater understanding of work and employee expectations. Students at all grades are required to complete community service hours. They are responsible for securing this placement, documenting the projects on which they work, and describing their experiences in writing.

What Lessons Have Been Learned about Starting a Charter School?

In addition to the school successes cited above, charter school directors were asked to share their pioneering experiences. Future charter school developers should consider these experiences as they plan ahead.

"We started our school with experienced staff. I know many charters hire young, energetic and inexperienced teachers. Our approach paid off, in spite of its costliness, because our veterans were able to deal with the inevitable challenge of start up." ***North Kenwood/Oakland***

"Build bridges! Look for community support. This is important in the search for a facility and recruitment of students." ***ACORN***

"Our charter school was created as a collaboration between the school district and a nonprofit foundation. As a result of the partnership, the school has been seen as an attractive and successful public school choice. In addition, both the foundation and the district were able to implement some mutually agreed upon reforms." ***Springfield Ball Charter***

"Make sure there is organized and planned time for staff discussion. The purpose of this time is to

refine and reshape the vision of the school and to solve the many logistical and operational challenges that inevitably present themselves in a start-up situation." ***North Lawndale***

"Have a good working relationship with your current school board. Stay in touch with the State Board of Education; let them know how your school is progressing." ***Fort Bowman Academy***

"It would have been more effective to start both with lower grades and a smaller number of students. We opened at full enrollment of all three grades (6th--8th). It would have been better to start with a smaller number of students, all in 6th and 7th grades, and let the school grow. Also, the school needed more start up money and time for adequate staff development." ***Triumphant***

"School teaching staff must be on board with the school's mission. When this match doesn't occur, then there is a 'push and pull' struggle that derails the curriculum and pedagogy. Another basic lesson is to provide appropriate staff development that encourages instructional planning to accommodate all students—average, gifted or challenged." ***Betty Shabazz***

"Three overarching themes are: stay true to your vision; be persistent; and develop tough skin." ***ACT***

What Instructional Practices Can Charter Schools Share after Two Years?

Although some charter schools had completed only two years, and others only one (see Table 1), there is much experience to share. As charter schools are viewed as "seeds of change" for Illinois education, their experiences as shared should be considered by the traditional public schools for potential emulation.

Organizational/Student Groupings

- Use of multiage program, whereby children are grouped with two to three different ages and remain with the same teacher for more than one year.
- Use of a longer day and/or longer school year, in order to have more time in school and time on task.
- Use of a tutorial approach, with less lecturing and more independent work.
- Placement of students into a "form" in accord with their learning ability, rather than placement by a "grade." This also allows for continuous progress.
- Use of a one-week "intersession" every seven weeks, to focus on project-centered, cross-curricular experiences or extended service learning experiences.
- Grading students at levels ranging from "excelling" to "needing remediation," rather than the traditional grades of A, B, C and so on.

Curriculum Approaches

- Use of the Waterford Early Reading Program, whereby K-2 students use this software daily to improve their early reading skills.
- Provision of foreign language instruction.
  - In Spanish to all students, as a complement to the literacy program. At that school, classroom teachers had introductory instruction in August and were present in the classroom when their students are in the Spanish class.
  - Another school offers French, Spanish and Sign Language.
  - Another school offers Twi (as spoken in Ghana), Ki-Swahili (as spoken in Kenya), Spanish (as spoken in the Dominican Republic), or Portuguese (as spoken in Mozambique and Brazil) in order to bolster their African-American curriculum.
  - Offering a six-week Spanish class to parents of all students enrolled in the foreign language instruction.
- Teaching academic subjects within an African context. This has helped students to connect their experiential background when interacting with texts and inevitably helps with their reading strategies and comprehension.
- Using hands-on activities in instruction and assessment. Thus, emergent readers may perform a play – complete with props and an audience – of a story they have read. Science classes tend to include everyday science experiments rather than only use of the textbooks.
- Using problem-solving and critical thinking aspects as woven into assessment and instruction. Children are encouraged to use computer technology to obtain information and to document data such as making graphs.
- Using Direct Instruction programs, with a staff professional development coordinator and a curriculum implementation specialist to assure quality control.
- Allowing older students as much independence as possible, by sharing decision-making with students and actively involving them in the learning process. School faculty create positive and respectful relationships between adults and students, direct help for students with personal problems, engage students in meeting the school's standards of competence and success, and actively help students in identifying their place in society.
- Viewing social skill development as a critical indicator of school success, developing a Social Skills Indicator Assessment Instrument, which measures the student's obtainment of critical social skills, an important measurement for alternative schools working with dropouts.
- Learning through an integrated studies approach, linking to students' daily lives.
- Using field study extensively, connecting the field experience to the work in the classroom.
- Requiring a two-week orientation at the start of school designed to begin establishing basic notetaking, computer and organizational skills, and expectations.
- Integrating areas of the curriculum. Students take English and History integrated as Humanities, and Math and Science are integrated as Analysis and Experimentation.
- Using project-based learning to enable students to synthesize information from various areas of study and give them a context for what they are learning.
- Integrating communication arts, incorporating computer technology, writing, public speaking, photography, drama, video and dance.
- Preparing for field experience, by participating in etiquette workshops and mock interviews. All students interview with their prospective field placements and sign contracts making them accountable for professional behavior.

Assessment Systems

- Using an Individualized Reading Inventory, with each student being assessed in September, February and May, and instructional plans then influenced by these results.
- Using performance-based assessments; for example, students are encouraged to design a creative project that demonstrates the level of mastery of skill.
- Using "learning continuums" to replace a traditional "report card," created to document student learning for parents.
- Preparing standards and assessments in other areas beyond the Illinois Learning Standards, such as standards for the Humanities and Technology courses and for their school's Disciplined Life program.
- Using an "exhibition and defense process" in order to be promoted after 8th grade and 10th grade, and to graduate from high school. This process involves student preparation of twelve items, including seven collections of work in academic subject areas and other requirements such as field experience and community service. Students must submit their work to a panel composed of school personnel as well as an outside community member. Panelists evaluate students' written work and hear oral defenses of four collections. The school's first group of 10th graders participated in this process in 1998-99, and several were nearing completion as 1999-2000 began.

Professional Development

- Scheduling a daily 60-minute period designed to provide continuing teacher support, opportunities for teacher collaboration and joint planning, and assessment of the impact of innovations on student achievement, and employing consultants to work with teachers on specific focus areas.
- Assuring ongoing quality in delivering a "Direct Instruction" model by requiring and providing extensive teacher training before entering the classroom and ongoing training throughout the years.
- Serving as a local and area demonstration and dissemination site for innovative practices based on current research and best practices. To date, it has served as a visit site for individuals interested in starting a new charter school as well as a site for faculty of the entire district to attend quarterly seminars with their consultant on student behavior or an all day conference on multiage education.

What's been The Greatest Challenge for Charter Schools This Year?

The challenges faced by charter schools were many and varied. Chief on any list of concerns by charter school developers are facilities and funding, and this listing holds true.

Facilities

- Running out of space. *North Lawndale* shared space in a traditional elementary school by using an upper floor of the school. The sharing arrangement worked all right as a 9th grade school in 1998-99 but not as the charter school adds grades over time.
- Securing a permanent facility. Charter schools were in competition with the traditional public schools and each other within Chicago for precious school-ready space.
- Remodeling and updating the current facility. *ACT* owns its own building, the only charter school in Chicago to do so. How it can be remodeled and made current, given the financial constraints all charter schools face, is a significant concern.

Finance

- Securing sufficient funds. This is critical in order to offer equal, let alone competitive, salaries for charter school staff.
- Compensating teachers. As many of the charter schools have longer days or longer school years, adequate salaries from this viewpoint were also difficult.
- Receiving payments in a timely fashion from and through their local school districts.
- Allocating resources to provide an in-depth education **and** to maintain a safe and healthy environment in an older school building.
- Assuring adequate special education funding. While there are special education funds available for charter schools that operate their own special education services, such as Prairie Crossing Charter School, those funds are available only on a reimbursement basis and often are not sufficient as state resources to meet the needs. The need is particularly critical in the school's first year of operation as the provider of the special services. A mechanism needs to be in place to assure these services can be paid for during the first year of operation, and then continue on in a timely fashion.

Student and Family Needs

- Serving the multiple needs of emotionally needy students. These youth, in a number of the schools, have initially presented serious obstacles to learning.
- Engaging parents. Many families in low-income areas appear to be disenfranchised and disconnected. The charter schools must reach beyond the "traditional notes in the backpack" to connect these parents to their children's school community.
- Dealing with unprepared students at the high school level. This was especially difficult in the areas of literacy (students have a hard time reading and writing at grade level) and preparedness (students have bad homework habits and poor study and organizational skills).
- Student motivation. It is difficult in a small school to address the range of student abilities and motivation levels.
- Assuring special education services. When the district provides the service, there is a need to make sure that all of the services are provided. Addressing all of the legal requirements is important and time-consuming.

Administrative

- Opening a new charter school, especially as the first in a school district. Even for an experienced public school administrator, the amount of start-up work within a short timeframe was most challenging.
- Ensuring that all parents and staff "buy into" the mission and vision.
- Balancing the amount of administrative responsibility with the daily implementation of an innovative instructional program for at-risk students.
- Working with multiple sites under a single charter school umbrella, particularly in establishing policies and procedures to be applied across the board.

Have Any Charter Schools Closed?

Yes, two charter schools have closed, and for different reasons. Such school closures should be viewed as healthy, rather than casting any negative aspersions on charter schools.

In 1996-97, the *Peoria Alternative Charter School* was certified as the first charter school in Illinois. It chose to have a three-year charter. The school served its full three-year charter and

metamorphosed into operating as a Regional Safe School Program for all of Peoria County as of 1999-2000.

During 1998-99, the governing board of *Chicago Preparatory Charter High School* and Chicago District #299 agreed that Chicago Preparatory would cease functioning due to administrative, financial and educational concerns. The school closed on January 22, 1999. At the end of the first semester, students returned to traditional public schools within the Chicago school system. The charter was terminated and thus is available for subsequent use in Chicago.

Has There Been An Impact From The Appeal Process?

Charter school developers have been able to formally appeal denials of proposals by local boards of education since January 1998. Since then the Illinois State Board of Education has received ten appeals of applications denied by local school boards. One appeal was returned as being submitted in an untimely fashion; one was withdrawn; six were denied due to noncompliance with the *Illinois Charter Schools Law*; and two schools were chartered by the state.

Without the appeal process being in place, no suburban charter schools would have been open to date. Thomas Jefferson and Prairie Crossing Charter Schools opened in fall 1999 as a result of approval by the State Board of Education in June 1998 and December 1998, respectively. Both schools had to meet health/life safety standards, the staff requirements in the *Illinois Charter Schools Law*, and provide a curriculum and standards in accordance with that law. Both schools are in operation in 1999-2000 as a result of the state authorization.

Were there any Special Charter School Activities in 1998-99?

Action Seminars
The State Board of Education, in partnership with Leadership for Quality Education and the North Central Regional Education Lab, conducted a Charter School Action Seminar in February 1999. The purpose of the Action Seminar was to discuss, with key Illinois stakeholders, issues regarding facilities and funding. Participants were legislators, the Governor's Office, State Superintendent McGee, State Board of Education members and staff, parent representatives, school administrative representatives, teacher organizations, school organizations and many others. As a result of the seminar and subsequent dialogue, two bills were introduced and subsequently passed by the Illinois General Assembly in spring 1999 and enacted into law by Governor George Ryan in August 1999.

- Public Act 91-405 (SB 648 of 1999 by Senator O'Malley and Representative. Krause) allows "Transition Impact Aid" for districts with new charter schools, state start-up funds for charter schools which parallel the federal start-up funds, access to public school transportation in a fashion similar to transporting nonpublic school students, a revolving facilities loan fund, and other provisions. These provisions were subsequently funded through FY00 appropriations.

- Public Act 91-407 (HB 230 of 1999 by Representative Bassi and Senator O'Malley) allows local school districts to sponsor a charter school, in addition to the prior authority for not-for-profit organizations to sponsor charter schools.

Another seminar in October 1999 was held by the same partners, with similar stakeholders, to discuss the critical issue of special education services and funding within charter schools.

Joint Legislative Committee

At the end of the 1999 spring session for the Illinois General Assembly, Representative Larry Woolard as chair of the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee suggested to statewide school organizations that there be a series of charter school visits and public hearings. That offer was extended to the Senate Education Committee members as well. In conjunction with the Governor's Office and the State Board of Education, such a series was held. The purpose of the Joint Committee was to "*...become oriented, gather additional information on particular issues of interest, and use the data to make informed decisions regarding charter schools in the future...*"

Visits were made to various sites around the state:

- Springfield Ball Charter School, of Springfield, in June 1999 (also hearing from Fort Bowman Academy Charter School, Cahokia, at that site)
- Noble Street Charter School, of Chicago, in July 1999.
- Academy for Communications and Technology Charter School, of Chicago, in August 1999.
- Prairie Crossing Charter School, of Grayslake, in September 1999.

During the public hearings a number of suggestions were offered in order to improve Illinois charter schools.

In addition to legislators and representatives of statewide educational organizations, individuals representing charter schools as well as community interests attended the hearings. Many of the participants offered comments on their own charter school experience. Family members and students delineated why they had selected a particular charter school. These reasons often were for safety, discipline, location, small school size or curricular approaches. Openness to change, flexibility and new approaches, willingness to be accountable for student results, smaller class size, and locations closer to home were among the advantages cited by parents. Parent involvement was a theme discussed in all of the hearings. Parents were active by making the initial choice for their children to attend the school. The majority of the schools were initially planned with parental participation, and worked to encourage such assistance on an ongoing basis.

As anticipated, school representatives spoke about financial concerns for their schools. Locating and supporting a facility (temporary and/or permanent), paying off loans, and having sufficient funding on a daily basis can be a considerable problem for new charter schools, particularly for those whose application and current structure does not include a partner who can offer financial support.

The "freedoms" of charter schools were also discussed. What does this release from certain requirements mean for the traditional public schools? Legislators frequently asked, "*What '"mandates" could be set aside for traditional public schools, too, so that the schools could still be successful and students achieve the standards?*" Charter school representatives indicated that requirements in the areas of hiring, staffing, pay for faculty, school hours and days, leadership, open and shared decision-making, teacher empowerment, and curriculum

approaches could be considered. Other non-legislative members of the Joint Committee, however, simply told legislators: "*Tell us what to do, not how, and hold us accountable...*"

These suggestions were discussed at the wrap-up meeting of the Committee on November 16, 1999 in Springfield. A final report of the committee's work is attached to this document. The following are the suggestions offered at the various public hearings

Governance and Authorization Issues

- Allow additional charter schools by lifting the cap.
- Establish alternative paths for authorizing charter schools.
- Revise criteria for ISBE to reverse a local denial.

Finance Issues

- Modify the funding formula for serving children with special needs (disabilities or at risk), especially within a state-approved charter school.
- Provide start-up funds for furniture, supplies and so on, and have the funds available to the developers prior to the opening of school for student services.
- Address capital costs, as school buildings are a major issue.
- Fully fund the "Transition Impact Aid" funding.
- Fully fund the costs by the state when ISBE grants a charter.

Technical Assistance and/or Policy Issues

- Make charter schools attractive to suburban school districts.
- Consider whether the demographics of a charter school should match the demographics of the host school district.
- Maintain a five-year moratorium on any charter school legislation, to allow time to evaluate how the current law is working.
- Consider using federal charter school grants differently.
- Clarify the law as to legislative intent regarding multiple sites being operated by a single charter.
- Clarify intent of the law to allow schools to locate outside of the district's geographic area.
- Clarify the law as to whether or not all members of a charter school governing board must be residents of the authorizing district.
- Examine the advocacy role of ISBE in dealing with charter schools.
- Clarify accountability and its measures for all parties.
- Consider how traditional public schools can become more flexible.

As the original purpose of the Committee was to "*...become oriented, gather additional information on particular issues of interest, and use the data to make informed decisions regarding charter schools in the future...*" Committee members believed that the purpose had been addressed. Data and information gleaned during this process will be used during 2000 as legislative matters surface regarding charter schools.

What Statutory Changes Are Suggested for Charter Schools?

A specific requirement of the annual report is "*...each annual report shall include suggested changes in State law necessary to strengthen or change charter schools...*" Many of the recommendations mirror the challenges stated by the charter schools as the administrators

reflect on the past school year, and were offered at the public hearings noted above as well as in the annual reports to the State Board of Education this fall.

Recommendations from Charter Schools

Charter schools were asked what changes in state law would be useful to them in the future. While the State Board of Education is not recommending these changers occur, the report reflects recommendations from providers in several areas. Again, facilities and finance figure prominently.

Facility Needs

- Help schools in facility acquisition or upgrade.
- Allow financial provisions for the charter school to address capital improvements other than through the per capita tuition payment.
- Institute a provision for funding assistance for charter school facilities on an ongoing basis.

Finance Needs

- Pay charter schools directly through the State, not through districts.

Personnel Needs

- Include noncertified employees in the Illinois Municipal Employees Retirement Fund, just as certificated employees are part of the Teachers Retirement System.
- Modify the Chicago Teacher Pension Fund requirements to enable retirees of Chicago #299 to teach in Chicago charter schools.
- Allow retirees to teach more than 100 days without negatively affecting their pensions.
- Include all full-time employees in the teachers' pension system, not just certificated teachers.

Administrative Needs

- Consider setting charter schools apart from their locally authorizing districts once the charter schools are recertified.
- Lift the cap on the number of charter schools permitted.

Recommendations from the State Board of Education

Last year the State Board of Education offered recommendations in several areas. The major area was financing charter schools—alternative methods to support them, providing facility funding. Other areas recommended were modifying the number of charters allowed, a technical amendment to the revolving loan provision, another change to the transportation provision and allowing children of charter school founders preference in enrollment.

Several of those recommendations came to fruition in Public Act 91-407, namely facility funding and the technical change in the revolving loan fund, state start-up funds, modification of the transportation language so that charter school students can now ride public school buses in a manner similar to nonpublic school students, and transition impact aid to financially ease the burden on local school districts when authorizing new charter schools.

Given the fact that so many of the earlier recommendations have been enacted, and that the General Assembly is facing an abbreviated session with a focus on emergency issues only, it is recommended by the Illinois State Board of Education that the General Assembly consider the following changes:

- **Instituting a provision, which will address special education reimbursement in the first year of a charter school's existence, as the school makes a transition into the routine reimbursement system for special education services.**
- **Modifying the provision in the law stating $250/child for the facility loan provision, up to $2,000/child.**
- **Supporting raising the cap on charter schools in Chicago, allowing an additional 5 schools every year once the cap of 15, then 20, then 25 and so on is reached.**

What Does the Future Look Like for Charter Schools in Illinois?

1999-2000 Schools

We believe it looks promising. As of 1999-2000, there are 17 schools that are in operation for the school year--12 in Chicago, 3 downstate and 2 in the suburban area. The newly opened schools in 1999-2000 are described below:

- *Alain Locke Charter School.* Developed by 21st Century Urban Schools, a partnership of the Inner City Teaching Corps and the Ryan Foundation, the Alain Locke Charter School in Chicago serves as a model for urban education around the country, combining excellence in academics, technology, social development and community responsibility.

- *Noble Street Charter School.* Led by two Chicago public high school teachers in partnership with the Northwestern University Settlement House, the charter school prepares urban youth to function successfully in society by emphasizing commitment to educational excellence, civic responsibility and respect for the community, the environment and others.

- *Prairie Crossing Charter School.* Located in Grayslake, this school serves youngsters from Fremont District #79 and Woodland District #50 (Lake County). This school serves grades K-2. The environment is the theme of the school.

- *Southern Illinois University, East St. Louis Charter School.* Located in East St. Louis District #189 (St. Clair County), this school opened in fall 1999. It is located on the campus of a former community college and serves high school youth.

- *Thomas Jefferson Charter School.* This school serves youth from Community Consolidated District #59 (Elk Grove Village, Cook County). This school opened on September 13, 1999, at the Steinmetz Academy in Chicago and then moved and re-opened on October 26, 1999, in Des Plaines. The school serves grades K-8.

Additional Schools

One more school has been locally authorized to operate as a charter school in 2000-2001. It is Edison-Great Builders of Cities Charter School in Chicago. Created by Prologue, a local alternative school organization, and the Edison Project, a national education management company, the charter school will offer longer days and home computers for every student, and will dedicate 25% of its curriculum to careers in construction, urban planning, architecture and steel.

Chicago had granted 13 of its 15 charters. In October 1999 they accepted additional applications and received seven. While those are currently in a review process, in December the Chicago Board of Education will decide on authorizing additional charter schools. The board will likely have granted the maximum 15 charters that are allowed, and have additional quality applications they would like to have in operation in the future should the cap be lifted.

There are several federal "stimulus" grants funded by the State Board of Education, which may result in charter school applications to local school boards for 2000-2001 (e.g., Rockford, Wheaton, Crete-Monee). Other areas are in the process of seeking stimulus grant funds.

Additionally, Public Act 91-405 (HB 230 of 1999) allows local school districts to be sponsors of charter schools. There are several individual districts and other districts in a joint agreement fashion that are exploring this option for fall 2000.

Should all of the charter schools in various planning stages come to fruition, it is not anticipated that the limit of 15 charter schools downstate and 15 in the suburban area will be reached for fall 2000. However, that could be the case for a subsequent school year.

Does Illinois Evaluate Charter Schools?

Yes, the State Board of Education is beginning to formally do so. Pursuant to Public Act 91-407 (SB 648 of 1999) and supported by federal charter school funds in the 1999-2002 federal grant cycle, the State Board of Education will be doing a formal external evaluation of charter schools. Selection of a contractor for a three-year evaluation is in process.

Among the questions to be asked during the three-year evaluation will be

- To what extent do charter schools differ from traditional public schools in numerous specific areas?

- To what extent are parents, teachers, staff and the community satisfied with charter schools?
- To what extent has each charter school met its stated goals and objectives?
- To what extent have any changes in traditional public schools in the host district(s) been a result of the innovations used in charter schools?
- To what extent have charter schools in Illinois met the provisions of the charter school law?
- What is the nature of school governance within Illinois charter schools?
- To what extent does the nature of school governance affect student achievement?
- To what extent are Illinois charter schools viable alternatives to traditional public schools in terms of school management/governance and fiscal operations?
- To what extent has the freedom from rules and laws affected charter schools?
- What rules and laws are charter schools not following as part of their operation?
- From what rules and laws could traditional public schools be released without adversely affecting student achievement?
- What conditions must exist for traditional public schools to embrace and implement any of the innovations successfully used in charter schools?

It is anticipated that evaluation information from each year's report will be shared through this annual report and with educators statewide.

In summary, as stated at the November 16, 1999, final meeting of the Joint Legislative Committee on Charter School Hearings, there are many chapters on Illinois charter schools yet to be written. They need to be nurtured and supported during their initial stage. With the exception of the Peoria Alternative Charter School, no Illinois charter school has served its full term. No charter school has yet sought to be reauthorized. All are building the data and looking at student achievement in terms of being able to prove that they have been accountable for results. They all should be viewed as "seeds for change."

Attachment #1

1998-99 Charter Schools

ACORN Charter School 3814 W. Iowa Chicago, Illinois 60651	**ACT Charter School** 4319 West Washington Chicago, Illinois 60624
Chicago International Charter School 2235 North Hamilton Chicago, Illinois 60647 and 9530 South Throop Chicago, Illinois 60643	**Fort Bowman Academy Charter School** 22 Delano Drive Cahokia, Illinois 62206
North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School 4611 South Ellis Chicago, Illinois 60653	**North Lawndale Charter School** 1616 S. Spaulding Chicago, Illinois 60623
Octavio Paz Charter School 2049 W. Congress Parkway Chicago, Illinois 60612 and 2651 W. 23rd Street Chicago, Illinois 60608	**Peoria Alternative Charter School** 919 N.E. Jefferson Peoria, Illinois 61603
Perspectives Charter School 1532 South Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60605	**Betty Shabazz International Charter School** 7823 S. Ellis Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60619
Springfield Ball Charter School 2530 East Ash Springfield, IL 62703	**Triumphant Charter Middle School** 4953 South Seeley Chicago, Illinois 60609
Youth Connection Charter School 10 West 35th Street Suite 11F4-2 Chicago, Illinois 60616	**Chicago Preparatory Charter High School** (closed mid-year)

Attachment #2

Final Report of the 1999 Joint Legislative Committee on Charter Schools Hearings
December 1999

Background
As discussed in May 1999 during the waning days of the Illinois General Assembly Spring Session, the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee leadership sought out representatives of statewide education organizations for a dialogue on charter schools. The issue discussed was what information was needed in order to understand the concerns raised in committee discussions on what became Public Act 91-407 (formerly Senate Bill 648). There was a consensus on the need to gather additional information on Illinois charter schools. Site visits and public hearings were suggested as means to broaden the base of available information.

In order to address this initiative, the Joint Legislative Committee on Charter Schools was formed on an ad hoc basis. The membership of the Joint Committee consisted of all members of the House and Senate education committees, plus the leadership of statewide education organizations, under the leadership of Rep. Larry Woolard, Dr. Hazel Loucks, Deputy Governor for Education, and the State Board of Education.

The purpose of the Joint Committee was to "*...become oriented, gather additional information on particular issues of interest, and use the data to make informed decisions regarding charter schools in the future...*" *This* was delineated at the initial meeting and echoed throughout the later meetings statewide.

The information gathering of the Joint Committee consisted of an orientation to charter schools from a national speaker, four site visits, and three public hearings held around the state. Public hearings were held at three of the four sites visited, as the initial visit began with an orientation to charter schools nationally. The timeframe used was to gather information after the spring session ended yet prior to the fall session of the General Assembly.

Site Visits
Committee members stated at the initial meeting in May that they wanted to visit charter schools currently in operation. During 1998-99 school year, there were 13 charter schools in operation (10 in Chicago; 3 downstate). During 1999-2000 school year, 17 charter schools were in operation (12 in Chicago; 2 suburban; and 3 downstate). While charter schools often have longer school years than traditional public schools, none were or are in operation throughout the entire school year. Therefore, the school visits were arranged during the time that the Joint Committee was in operation and charter schools were open.

Visits made were to:

- **Springfield Ball Charter School, visited on June 24, 1999, just prior to the end of its school year.** Springfield Ball Charter School, in partnership with the Ball Foundation, is authorized by Springfield District #186 (Sangamon County). In 1998-99, its first year of operation, the school served grades K-3.

During the visit, the Committee heard from Dr. Chris Pipho of the Education Commission of the States. He spoke to the Committee in order to orient them on charter schools nationally. In the afternoon, the Committee visited the charter school classrooms and heard from the principal and a panel of three teachers about teaching in the new charter school.

- **Noble Street Charter School, visited on July 19, 1999, the same day as its opening of summer school/opening day of the charter school.** Noble Charter School, sponsored by Northwestern University Settlement House, is authorized by Chicago District #299 (Cook County). This high school initially serves grade 9.

  The Committee spent the morning touring the school and the Charter School Resource Center (operated by Leadership for Quality Education). At noon the Committee heard from a panel of parents and students regarding their expectations for the charter school and why they selected Noble Street. In the afternoon a public hearing was held.

- **Academy for Communication and Technology, visited on August 26, 1999, shortly after the school opened in 1999-2000 for its third year of operation.** The Academy for Communications and Technology (ACT) Charter School is authorized by Chicago District #299 (Cook County). The school now serves grades 6-11.

  The Committee visited and toured the school in the morning. The Committee then moved across the street to a nearby church and met with available faculty and students over lunch. In the afternoon a public hearing was held.

- **Prairie Crossing Charter School, visited on September 23, 1999, after the school began its initial year of operation on August 23, 1999.** Prairie Crossing Charter School is authorized by the State Board of Education and serves students from Woodland District #50 and Fremont District #59 (Lake County). The school began its first year of operation this fall and serves grades K-2.

  In the morning the Committee met with parents and then visited the school. In the afternoon the Committee moved to the nearby Lake County High School's Technology Campus and a public hearing was held.

There was positive support expressed by the school and general community for the Committee's site visits to charter schools throughout Illinois.

Committee Participation

All members of the House and Senate education committees were invited to participate. Members of statewide education organizations were also invited to participate. Those who did participate in one or more meetings are listed below:

Committee Attendance	June 24th	July 19th	Aug. 26	Sept. 23	Committee Attendance	June 24th	July 19th	Aug. 26	Sept. 23
Rep. Larry Woolard	✓	✓	✓	✓	Senator Arthur Berman			✓	
Dr. Hazel Loucks	✓		✓		Senator Wendell Jones				✓
State Supt. Max McGee	✓		✓		Senator Todd Sieben	✓			
Rep. Jerry Mitchell	✓	✓	✓		Janet Steiner, Marilyn McConachie or Connie Rogers, SBE members	✓		✓	✓
Rep. Suzanne Bassi	✓	✓		✓	Gail Lieberman, ISBE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rep. M. L. Cowlishaw	✓	✓			Nick Bellini, House-R Staff	✓			
Rep. Maggie Crotty	✓		✓	✓	Deanna Sullivan or Ben Schwarm, School Management Alliance	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rep. William Delgado		✓			Donna Baiocchi, ED-RED	✓		✓	✓
Rep. Susan Garrett				✓	Heidi Biederman, LUDA			✓	✓
Rep. Douglas Hoeft				✓	John Ayers, LQE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rep. Mike Smith	✓		✓		Laura Arterburn, IFT	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rep. Edgar Lopez		✓			Rep. Tom Johnson		✓	✓	
Will Burns, Senate-D Staff	✓				Peggy Agnos, LEND	✓			
Chris Everson, Jennifer Shehorn, Colleen Burke, Pat McAdams, Jacob Roseberry, House-D Staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	Paula Johnson Purdue, Rich Frankenfeld, Gay Larison, Michelle Ishmael, IEA	✓	✓	✓	✓

Public Hearings

In addition to Committee members, there were members of the general public who came to comment and/or listen to the commentary at the public hearings. Those individuals are noted below.

On behalf of various *charter schools*:

- *Springfield Ball Charter School*—Dr. Harriet Arkley (principal); Sue Dole (Ball Foundation); Dr. Diane Rutledge (Springfield Ball Charter School governing board and Springfield #186 administrator); Sarah Oehlert, Mary Ann Rupcick and Iris Baxter (teachers).
- *Fort Bowman Academy Charter School*—Phillip Plaetz (teacher, consultant).
- *Noble Street Charter School*— Michael Milke (co-founder); Ron Manderschied (sponsoring organization); Dan Vittum (Board president); Tim Brown (teacher); parents and students.
- *Academy for Communications and Technology Charter School*—Sarah Howard and Michelle Smith (co-directors); Anjou Ahuja (Board president); faculty and students; Afina Lockart, Douglas Van Dyke, Nadine Nader and Karen Croteau (teachers); Patricia Okiki and Derek Houston (parents).
- *North Lawndale Charter High School*—Decheon Atkins and Christopher Cummings (students); other students as well.
- *Prairie Crossing Charter School*—Kathy Johnston (principal); Michele Ryan (parent); and Miriam Frank (Board president).
- *North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School*—Barbara Williams (co-founder); Deborah Edmond and Susan Smith (parents).
- *Perspectives Charter School*—Glennese Harston (college counselor).
- *Triumphant Charter School*—Helen Hawkins (director); Gillene Hawkins Stanton (volunteer).
- *Betty Shabazz Charter School*—Makita Kheperu (parent).
- *Charter School Resource Center (LQE)*—Shawne Morgan (coordinator).
- *New Jersey Charter School Resource Center*—Sarah Tantillo (former coordinator).

Governor's State University—Sandra Robertson, with a charter school-in-the-making.

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On behalf of the *business sector*:

- Eden Martin as the president of the *Commercial Club of Chicago*.
- George Ranney as the president of the *Metropolis Project* for the Commercial Club of Chicago.

On behalf of *community organizations*:

- James Compton, president and CEO of the *Chicago Urban League*.
- Cynthia Thomas and Nancy Carstedt of the *Chicago Children's Choir*.
- Abha Padta, Ralph Hardy and Bruce Colet of *Asian Human Services* of Chicago.
- Trinita Logue, president and CEO, and Joe Neri, Director of Real Estate, of the *Illinois Facilities Fund*.

On behalf of *public schools/systems*:

- Robert Rozycki (associate superintendent for administration), *Township High School District #211*.
- Dr. Robert Howard (superintendent) and Gene Diemer (board of education member), *Community Consolidated School District #59*.
- Dennis Conti (superintendent) *and Dale Message (board of education member), Woodland District #50*.
- Gregory Richmond (charter schools director), *Chicago District #299*.
- John Hill (superintendent), *Anna District #37*.
- Carroll Phelps (superintendent), *Gallatin District #7*.
- Robert Brutcher (superintendent), *Edwards County Schools #1*.

As individuals:

- Dr. Chris Pipho, Education Commission of the States.
- Jason Klein, a doctoral student at Illinois State University.
- Sharon Damore, a consultant in Chicago.
- Ed Kirby, *Massachusetts Department of Education* (charter schools director).

Other individuals who participated in the visits or attended the hearings to gain more information about charter schools in Illinois included Colleen Atterbury; Shannon Bennett; Marie Bill; Gary Catalani; Pamela Hall Clark; Gordon Close; Eileen Dempsey; Josephine Det; Bob Davis; Deborah Edmond; Elizabeth Evans; Scott Foiles; Louise Florian; Jackie Gallagher; Stephanie Golemba; Lindy Greenly; Allene Harding; Kathleen Harris; Brenda Holmes; Maribel Hunter; Jennifer Jones; James Lewis; Mary McDonald; Maureen O'Donnell; Don Payton; Elizabeth Perriello-Rice; Mary Ann Pitcher; Mary Plemple; Mark Reinstein; Todd Rosenquiz; Bernice Smith; Susan Smith; Rosemary Swanson; Ryan Tyler; Cynthia Ward, Jeanette Weatherall; Kathy Wessel; and Helen White.

Comments from Participants at the Public Hearings

Many of the participants offered comments on their own charter school experience. Family members and students delineated why they had selected a particular charter school. These reasons often were for safety, discipline, location, small school size or curricular approaches. Openness to change, flexibility and new approaches, willingness to be accountable for student results, smaller class size, and locations closer to home were among the advantages cited by parents.

Parent involvement was a theme discussed in all of the hearings. Parents were active by making the initial choice for their children to attend the school. The majority of the schools were

initially planned with parental participation, and worked to encourage such assistance on an ongoing basis.

Charter school developers discussed the characteristics that made each of the charter schools unique, particularly when compared to the traditional public schools in their areas. Many of the charter schools offered an extended day or extended year. Alternative scheduling such as use of a block schedule was present, as was multi-age classes, use of the community and volunteers, offering foreign language across the grade spectrum and so on.

As school staff spoke at each meeting site or were available for informal discussions, the issue of staff qualifications arose. In some instances there are staff who meet the alternative credentialing route stipulated in the charter schools law; that is, a bachelor's degree, 5 or more years of experience in the field in which they will be teaching, and passing the tests of basic skills and subject matter given to teacher candidates. Some examples of staff who met these credentials were a journalist now teaching high school English and a native Spanish language speaker who was teaching Spanish.

As anticipated, school representatives spoke about financial concerns for their schools. Locating and supporting a facility (temporary and/or permanent), paying off loans, and having sufficient funding on a daily basis can be a considerable problem for new charter schools, particularly for those whose application and current structure does not include a partner who can offer financial support.

The "freedoms" of charter schools were also discussed. What did the charter schools state they would do in order to be accountable for results, as indicated in the charter schools law? What does this release from certain requirements mean for the traditional public schools? Legislators frequently asked, "*What 'mandates' could be set aside for traditional public schools, too, so that the school could still be successful and students achieve the standards?*" Charter school representatives indicated that requirements in the areas of hiring, staffing, pay for faculty, school hours and days, leadership, open and shared decision-making, teacher empowerment, and curriculum approaches could be considered. Other non-legislative members of the Joint Committee, however, simply told legislators: "*Tell us what to do, not how, and hold us accountable...*"

Recommendations from the Public Hearings

The recommendations offered by the participants during the public hearings were many and varied. They are summarized below. They should be read in conjunction with the comments at the end of the report which summarize the views of Joint Committee members.

Governance and Authorization Issues

- *Allow additional charter schools by lifting the cap.* Options cited for lifting the cap were to: allow 25 additional charter schools in Chicago over the next 5 years, or just allow more, with no exact number being given, or have no cap at all.
- *Establish alternative paths for authorizing charter schools.* Although the local board of education and the State Board of Education can authorize charter schools, other states use an independent board or other entities such as universities to authorize charter schools.
- *Revise criteria for ISBE to reverse a local denial.* The current criteria are: compliance with the law; and in the best interests of students it is designed to serve. It was said that ISBE should take the same view as the district must—an application in the best interests of *all* students.

Finance Issues

- *Modify the funding formula for serving children with special needs (disabilities or at risk), especially within a state-approved charter school.* The current finance mechanism does not allow sufficient dollars or flexibility for small state-authorized charter schools or for small school districts. Should the resident district have to provide such services and pay for them? What is the role of state-authorized charter schools in providing special education and paying for these services? Another suggestion given was to consider analyzing risk much the way the insurance industry does, for instance, using an approach similar to what State Farm does with farm risk.
- *Provide start-up funds for furniture, supplies and so on, and have the funds available to the developers prior to the opening of school for student services.*
- *Address capital costs, as school buildings are a major issue.* The facility loans are one step towards that goal but not the only one. The income stream has to be sufficiently sound and with sufficient capital.
- *Fully fund the Transition Impact Aid funding.*
- *Fully fund the costs by the State when ISBE grants a charter.* Consider fixed and variable costs of charter schools.

Technical Assistance and/or Policy Issues

- *Make charter schools attractive to suburban school districts.* While this was offered as a recommendation, no specific suggestions were offered beyond having the State fund such charters if it authorizes them.
- *Consider whether the demographics of a charter school should match the demographics of the host school district.*
- *Maintain a five-year moratorium on any charter school legislation, to allow time to evaluate how the current law is working.*
- *Consider using federal charter school grant differently,* as an incentive grant for charter schools to serve as a demonstration site for neighboring public schools. The current three-year grant from USDE, as approved in August 1999, does not have this component in it.
- *Clarify the law as to legislative intent regarding multiple sites being operated by a single charter.*
- *Clarify intent of the law to allow schools to locate at sites outside of the district's geographic area.*
- *Clarify the law as to whether or not all members of a charter school governing board must be residents of the authorizing district.*
- *Examine the advocacy role of ISBE in dealing with charter schools.* That agency should not lose sight of its role to help a district "burdened" with a charter school.
- *Clarify accountability and its measures for all parties.* Consider a standards-based test every year to follow every student every year. The critical issue is what are the students learning—objective, measurable performance.
- *Consider how traditional public schools can become more flexible.* Consider what needs to be done statewide: what mandates need to be repealed for all public schools, not just for a few charter schools.

Perhaps a fitting closing comment from the public was one by Sharon Damore, an educational consultant. At the public hearing at ACT in Chicago, she said: "Listen to testimony, observe faculties, and see the positive influence these charter schools can bring to the forefront. We need more of them."

The Joint Committee members did listen, did observe, and did comment on the positive influence of charter schools throughout the summer of 1999. They commented on the involvement of parents at the charter schools, schools of choice for families. Business, community and family involvement was obvious.

They also spoke to the similarities and differences with traditional public schools. While charter schools are still fairly new in Illinois, they are making their mark on the students they have served, and in some instances, are already making their mark on the larger school community. The vision of the leaders of the schools visited was reflected in the daily life of the schools, and was commendable.

As the original purpose of the Committee was to "*...become oriented, gather additional information on particular issues of interest, and use the data to make informed decisions regarding charter schools in the future...*" Committee members believed that the purpose had been addressed. Data and information gleaned during this process will be used during 2000 as legislative matters surface regarding charter schools.

Final Meeting and Discussion

The Joint Committee met on November 16, 1999 in Springfield to discuss these recommendations, reflect on the experience, and offer any final comments. Gail Lieberman reported on action by the committee to date. Questions were asked of State Superintendent McGee, Ms. Lieberman and Gregory Richmond of the Chicago Public Schools. Various legislators and other panel members offered feedback on the draft report as presented prior to the meeting and discussed in November.

Rep. Crotty stated she kept an open mind during the on-site visits and the various dialogues. She saw in charter schools what would be good for all students, and would like all schools to be similar to charter schools—teachers to be innovative, all schools to be schools of choice, and all schools to be safe.

Rep. Smith also found the visits to be informative. While he had voted against the charter school initially, he has found them innovative. He continues to study them, as it is still early in the life of Illinois charter schools. All families should be involved in their local public schools. We should make sure that the quality aspects from charter schools are available to all.

Rep. Bassi too appreciated the opportunities to be on-site and would like all children to have similar opportunities.

Rep. Mitchell appreciated the small class sizes he saw at the elementary school level, noted that administrators and teachers together made good things happen for students, and would like to see how charter schools can be used to help more students.

Rep. Delgado said he had toured all of his area schools this past summer, including Noble Charter High School. He believes all teachers in all Chicago Public Schools have autonomy in creating their curriculum. He believes charter schools are here to stay. He raised the question about Chicago needing to have the cap lifted due to their demographics.

Rep. Garrett said there has been divisiveness observed during her visit, which should not be the standard procedure. We should all work together on behalf of quality education.

Rep. Murphy stated that he did not support charter schools. He would like to see changes in the traditional public schools. He believes in the value of the charter school Joint Committee.

Katie Kelly on behalf of Leadership for Quality Education recommended lifting the cap in Chicago in some modest way, perhaps over a five-year period of time. There is community demand and need in Chicago.

Ann Dickett on behalf of South Cooperative Organization for Public Education (SCOPE) expressed concern about charter schools concerning the potential to undo what is seen as a leveling by public schools among students from all backgrounds. It must be ensured that an elitist, two-tiered public education system does not evolve. On the recommendations offered:

- SCOPE does not support lifting the cap at this time.
- SCOPE does not support expanding the authorization of charter schools to outside entities. If the SBE appeals process is maintained, the process should be revised to include meaningful criteria (beyond the two currently in law).
- SCOPE supports improved funding for students with disabilities in both charter schools and existing public school settings.
- SCOPE supports full accountability for charter schools, comparable to the high standards now required of all public school districts. Charter school students should be tested annually for the first three years, using existing tests at appropriate grade levels, to ensure that students are performing at least as well as their resident school district.

Laura Arterburn of the Illinois Federation of Teachers commented as well. She spoke to the summer site visits and the repetitive theme that "smaller is better" as voiced by charter school proponents. There was the potential for innovation at the school sites. The majority of charter school instructional personnel were certified, but some staff were not. She also mentioned problems by charter schools which have been approved by the State over local objection. Any change in the *Illinois Charter Schools Law* should consider the following points:

- Require all teachers to be certified and subject to the same Illinois laws as other teachers in the state.
- Retain the existing cap on charter schools.
- Approvals of charter schools should be made at a local level. Even when ISBE overrides a local rejection, responsibilities need to be clearly stated.
- Encourage teacher-based charter schools and possibly give them priority.
- Limit or eliminate the use of "for profit" charter schools, even on behalf of a non-profit charter holder.
- Allow existing collective bargaining agents to establish specific contracts for charter school employees within their jurisdiction.
- Provide adequate funding for all special education services in the state.
- Use charter schools as lab schools for all public schools.

Donna Baiocchi of ED-RED noted that good things are happening for students enrolled in most charter schools. She observed that parental involvement is evident, and that the difficulties of charter schools are often those faced by all public schools. Some of the positive aspects of charter schools—small class size, selective admissions in terms of grades or ages, waiving state mandates—are not available to traditional public schools. She offered recommendations:

- Encourage local school districts to participate in this initiative.
- Support efforts to resolve and increase special education funding for all public schools.
- Fully fund state-authorized charter schools from the state level, not locally.
- Retain the cap of 45 charter schools.

- Assure that charter schools are in the best interests of all students, not just the students the charter school intends to serve.

Debra Strauss of the Illinois PTA shared their position on charter schools. They believe that charter schools could be a viable part of the reform initiative. They are but one option in a continuum of educational reform. They support recommendations as follows:

- Assure operation by non-profit organizations and on a non-religious, non-sectarian basis.
- Assure charter schools open to all students.
- Assure that there is no tuition or fees, which might preclude participation by low-income families.
- Assure that there is no negative impact on existing schools.
- Improve funding for all schools, including charter schools.
- Subject charter schools to all federal and state laws regarding health and safety and prohibit discrimination.
- Hold charter schools accountable to the local board of education.
- Assure that teachers are certified in order to insure the highest standards of teaching.

Paula Johnson Purdue spoke on behalf of the Illinois Education Association. She asked if recertification for certificated teachers is so critical, how can some instructional personnel at charter schools not be certificated? She encouraged further learning and education about charter schools before any further changes are made.

Ben Schwarm spoke on behalf of the Illinois School Management Alliance. He stated that it was too early for a final judgement on charter schools, or for changes in the cap. Many of the problems in traditional public schools are mirrored in the Illinois charter schools. Let's continue to study.

Heidi Biederman of LUDA stated again that her organization supports charter schools as seeds for change. There are other options for choice, such as the Edison Schools.

Rep. Woolard conducted and concluded the final meeting, as he had all prior meetings of the Joint Committee. He stated this should not be the final time for discussion of charter schools. His goal is to perfect the public schools for all children, and improve opportunities for all school children. He appreciated the high community and family involvement observed in the charter schools as he visited all of the sites, and would like to see these examples emulated in other schools in Illinois. He will seek to reconvene the Joint Committee in the spring and continue the dialogue begun in 1999. He thanked all parties involved for their attendance and participation.